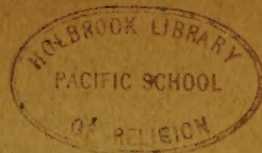


The Christian News-Letter

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J. H. OLDHAM



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DEAR MEMBER,

The following letter from Professor Karl Mannheim, to the significance of whose work I drew attention not long ago in a Supplement (C.N.-L. No. 104), is of more than ordinary importance. It formulates clearly and concisely the essential political problem of our time. Vast issues of good or evil for mankind depend on whether this country by a bold, imaginative, resolute choice is able to overcome the forces which are driving mankind towards a totalitarian order and to offer to the world the example of a society which has found the means of achieving freedom, responsibility, social justice and community under the conditions of the machine age. In the political sphere this issue dwarfs every other. And it is not only the major political issue to-day, but also a religious issue, since freedom, responsibility, social justice and community are God's purpose for man.

THE HISTORICAL POLITICAL TASK OF BRITAIN

Here is Professor Mannheim's letter :—

"You said in a recent Supplement that it has still to be proved that in the conditions of to-day there is a really effective alternative to the totalitarian state. I am convinced of the truth of this, and would like to develop a little more fully what is involved.

"(1) Very few will question that in the present conditions of society *laissez-faire* Liberalism must be replaced by some form of planning.

"(2) The whole structure of modern society is governed by the fact that new technical inventions (such as aeroplanes, bombs, railways, the telephone and wireless) and the large-scale organization of industry, finance, administration, education and other means of influencing public opinion have created key positions which make it possible for those who hold them to dominate society. This offers a strong temptation to the ambitious to seize these centres of power and, when they have embarked on this course, they are driven on to gather into their hands all remaining positions of control. Even those who are naturally averse to such a course may be forced into it by the fear that their opponents may act first.

"(3) Only two forms of a planned society seem thus far to have emerged—Communism and Fascism.

"(4) Neither of these could be established in Britain except by a violent revolution. The attempt to set up either system in a highly developed and socially differentiated country such as ours would mean a bitter class war, the suppression of many sections of the population and the establishment of a dictatorship.

"(5) Everyone ought to face the fact that under modern technical conditions there is little hope that a dictatorship once set up can or will ever wither away. When the powerful controls over public opinion and action have been seized, the dispossession of those who wield these powers becomes almost impossible.

"(6) It is vital, therefore, that the new planned order in this country should not come about through revolution, since in that case freedom will have disappeared.

"(7) The crucial question is whether the planning of the transition to a new type of society, which is both planned and free, is feasible. I believe that it is on the following conditions :—

"(a) If we are able to awaken the vision of a social order which will demand sacrifices from all groups without eliminating them, and will ensure their security during the period of transition.

"(b) If the planned order is definitely opposed to Fascism, by which I mean a system in which power is the uncontrolled and unchallengeable possession of a few hundred people maintaining their ascendancy by organized force.

"(c) If the agreed aim is the establishment of social justice.

"(d) If plans can be worked out which provide for the control of the key positions in industry, without limiting individual initiative in cases where it has important functions to fulfil.

"(8) Among those who desire these ends there may be wide differences of opinion regarding the degree of control that is necessary to achieve them. The choice between different policies depends partly on technical enquiries into the practical working and probable results of each, and partly on the degree of support that can be obtained for one or the other. The decision between them can be reached by democratic methods, if there is fundamental agreement that any form of totalitarianism is barred.

"(9) To achieve such a society is a colossal task, and it can be carried through only if there is a body of people who see clearly how much is at stake and who are fully committed to overcoming the difficulties and to creating a society planned for freedom. Dangerous forces are apt to work in the dark, and it is the first steps towards the establishment of a dictatorship that most of all need to be watched. The mere propagation of ideas, unsupported by other measures, might even play into the hands of the enemy by creating the comfortable illusion that active discussion of right policies is enough to make everything safe. If sinister designs are to be prevented, those who are alive to the danger must make sure that a careful watch is kept on what is going on beneath the surface.

"(10) It is no less essential, if the enterprise is to be more than vague aspiration, that machinery should be set up for the thorough examination of the technical possibilities and difficulties of the various ways of arriving at the goal and of the practical steps that are necessary to make the plan effective."

The importance of Professor Mannheim's formulation lies in the clearness with which he sees the dominant influence of new techniques on our present society. As was pointed out in the Supplement to C.N.L. No. 104, the historical achievement of Karl Marx was that he perceived the dynamic significance of technique in the sphere of production. What he overlooked, and what has since become apparent as the governing factor in the life of to-day, is the significance of technology in non-economic spheres. What Professor Mannheim would impress on us is that it is useless to keep on re-affirming our undying faith in freedom and responsibility; we have to realize that new techniques have created conditions that never existed before, and that unless we understand what these techniques are and how they operate, no matter how loud and how widely repeated our professions of belief in freedom and responsibility may be, these will inevitably disappear unless a real meaning can be given to them under the entirely new conditions which exist to-day.

In arousing us to what is at stake he is awakening us to a matter of supreme concern to Christians. Let freedom and responsibility go, and Christianity as a life in this world goes with them; the *person*, to whom the Gospel is addressed, is no longer there. A Christian who understands the world in which he is living has no choice but to take part in this political battle, since central Christian values are involved. Many who do not profess themselves Christians are also concerned in the fight, since it is the existence of man as a free and responsible person that is involved. But it is precisely in flinging themselves into the struggle, as the field in which in our day God's will has to be obeyed, that Christians will discover afresh for themselves new meanings in their faith and win for it a new understanding among those who at present hold aloof because it seems lacking in reality.

Many, both inside and outside the Church, are conscious to-day of the gulf between organized religion and contemporary life. The divorce is real and serious, and an immense effort will be needed to overcome it. But it is important to realize that beneath the surface powerful forces are creating a situation in which the intimate connection between Christian faith and the realities of our political and social existence is becoming increasingly clear.

THE NEEDS OF YOUTH

A Director of Education has sent me the following facts about youth in the county for which he is responsible.

Of every seven children in the age group 14-16, one is receiving continued education in a secondary school and one and a half attend some form of part-time continued education. One out of seven may be a member of one of the national voluntary youth organizations, but in addition may be at school or attending evening classes. In other words, 75 per cent are probably in normal times out of touch with any organization, statutory or voluntary, which is concerned with their spiritual, mental and physical development. The change from full-time schooling to "the world" is a catastrophic event in the life of the individual. The child is removed from a society designed for its particular benefit into one in which it is the least important part, not by a gradual process but arbitrarily and suddenly. This occurs at puberty, which is one of the most sensitive periods in a child's mental, physical and nervous development. The magnitude of the problem can be gauged by the fact that in this medium-size county there are some 28,000 young people between 14-18, which means that 21,000 are under the care of no organization concerned for their benefit.

The position under war-time conditions has improved, as far as the boys are concerned, by the creation of various pre-service training units which have attracted boys who were hitherto unattached. This has happened on a considerable scale, so that one out of five boys of 16 is a member of the A.T.C. and over half the boys in the age-groups 17-18, 16-17 are members of either the A.T.C., Home Guard or Army Cadets. The balance, who have been interviewed recently, in the main express a strong preference for this type of training. It is important to examine the appeal which these pre-service organizations undoubtedly make to the adolescent boy and to find out whether it is possible to translate this appeal into a peace-time form.

The writer suggests that the following facts deserve attention :—

(1) The boys are being treated as important members of the community with a part to play that is of equal status to their elder brothers.

(2) The war provides a sense of national unity which is normally absent in peace.

(3) The uniform is the King's uniform, and similar or identical to that worn by men. This is an important point because the mere fact of a uniform as such does not constitute such a universal appeal.

(4) The objective of these organizations is limited and obvious. They wish to train good airmen, soldiers and sailors, and their objective can be described and judged, whereas the "good citizen" or even the "good Christian" are much less capable of definition and there is, indeed, a fundamental difference of view on their interpretation.

There is no equivalent to these organizations as far as the girls are concerned, although steps are now being taken to try and provide it. The vast mass of young women are as unattached now as they were before the war, and the result has been that there is a greater degeneration of morale among them than among boys. Girls in the 16-18 class are all too frequently dominated by a hedonistic attitude towards life, and being as a sex less community conscious than men they are less able to see themselves as part of a national effort or to have a sense of loyalty to a unit larger than the home. The problem of the girls is, therefore, more immediately difficult than the boys, but even if something is evolved that will attract them in war-time the same difficulty will arise in translating it into terms of peace.

HUNGER IN BELGIUM

News from Belgium from reliable sources shows that the food situation there is becoming rapidly worse and that the months immediately ahead, before the harvesting of the cereal and potato crops, are likely to be the most severe which the people have so far had to face. Help from her neighbours to tide over this period is unlikely, for all are

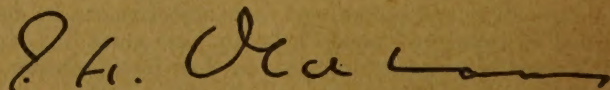
shorter of food than they were this time last year. The death-rate for January for the whole of Belgium was 21.5 per 1,000—almost the same as the death-rate in Austria at the height of the famine after the last war. In hospitals the death-rate among children under six has increased by 300 per cent since before the war, and the number of premature deliveries has quadrupled. Diseases due to malnutrition, especially rickets and tuberculosis, are increasing rapidly. In most of the schools there are no games because children are too weak to play them, and the normal routine of school is considerably disorganized by frequent absence and fainting.

The Belgians have done all they can to give priority to the needs of their children. The organization of such supplies as there are is in the hands of the Belgians themselves, who have their own Ministry of Food. The making of butter is restricted in order that there may be a little milk for every child. Free soup is provided in every school and a free meal in the most affected areas. Charitable organizations have been active in relieving distress. Parcels of food from Portugal have been passed from frontier to frontier by Red Cross officials, and have been acknowledged by their recipients, but unfortunately they contain only what is available in Portugal, mostly sardines and dried fish. By superb organization more than 10,000 French and Belgian children have had a three months' stay in Switzerland since the outbreak of war. But in spite of all that can be done, famine conditions grow worse and their results more irremediable every day.

Any action which is to save the lives of children in Belgium must be swift. Disease is now so prevalent that medicaments—especially vitamins, tonics and dried milk—are as urgently needed as food. Two hundred tons of food have been sent in one week to British prisoners of war in Germany; if two to three hundred tons of carefully selected supplies could be sent to Belgium in a month for administration through hospitals and clinics, it would bring health and even life itself to thousands who are condemned to death or to life-long deformity of body and mind.

The possibilities of initiating such a relief scheme and of administering it through Belgian hospitals under adequate control are being actively explored. It will not abolish famine, but it may be enough to save the next generation and will give hope and encouragement to the Belgian people. Steps are being taken to bring to the attention of the British Government the strong and widespread desire in this country that whatever can be done in present circumstances should be done with the least possible delay.

Yours sincerely,



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